

# Reviews

**THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS. VOLUME XXI: SCIENCE AND CHRISTIAN FAITH** by Karl Rahner, translated by Hugh M. Riley, Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1968. Pp. 279. £25.

Karl Rahner, who died in 1964 at the age of eighty, originally expected that this series of collected essays would conclude with the twentieth volume, but, as it turned out, he was able to keep on lecturing until nearly the end—so, as he writes in the preface to the first posthumously published collection: 'When we unexpectedly discover in our old age that we are still capable of working and so feel obliged to continue, we may still publish the results of our work, which we ourselves look upon as a gift'. It would be ungracious to look the old horse in the mouth but the truth is that most of these essays add nothing to what Rahner has often said before. The only sign of old age is a welcome simplicity in his prose style, which was once celebrated for its recalcitrant complexity. But it would be impossible for any reader who began with this volume to understand how intellectually exciting the first volume in the series was when it appeared in English in 1961—despite, and perhaps even because of, the Ciceronian periods which Cornelius Ernst sweated so hard to reproduce.

The first third of the book deals with theology as such. In the longest essay Rahner lays out the ground for dialogue between theologians and natural scientists—starting off with the observation that 'in recent decades theology has not occupied itself very intensively with borderline questions between the natural sciences and itself', which only shows that he never heard of Peacocke, Polkinghorne and many others. But then again Rahner, in this at least like most theologians, never cared much about what was happening outside his own language and culture. In the other essays in this section he charts the dramatic shift from neoscholastic theology to the new theology which his own generation made prevail at Vatican II. While in no way as acrimoniously pessimistic and defeatist as some Vatican II theologians have since become about what they helped to bring about, Rahner nevertheless castigates Catholic theology for now being 'pallid', and for exhibiting 'a certain resignation' and certainly 'a little less brilliance'. Indeed he awards, no doubt with Swabian irony, no higher a mark than 'Grade C' to the generation which includes Kasper, Küng and Metz (p. 75)! But most of the essays remain very abstract and unspecific. The only really interesting one defends the thesis that 'European theology', which includes 'the theology of the Roman teaching office' (page 86) but which, although he never says so explicitly, is essentially the theology of the universities, research institutes, learned journals and so forth funded by Catholics in western Europe and North America, must be 'the guardian of tradition' and the 'mediator among other theologies' as the Catholic Church enables (or 350

suffers) the spread of 'non-European theologies' in the decades to come.

In the second group of essays Rahner discusses such matters as 'maturity in faith'—'Educated Christians must forge for themselves a concept of God and of his eternal salvation grounded in Jesus Christ. It need not be a cause for alarm if they do not know exactly what an indulgence is or how many sacraments there are. By managing the explicit contents of their minds in this economical way, people can quite properly reduce the number of things which are enormously overburdening and cluttering their minds' (p. 122); agnosticism and 'the true agnosticism which is required of Christians' (p. 136), atheism and 'theistic ecumenism', and the 'hierarchy of Truths'—'given no more than a quarter of an hour can you tell pagans in one of Europe's big cities who have never experienced a really challenging encounter with Christianity what a Christian really believes?' (page 167). In the essay on faith it is a pity that Rahner's reference to George Tyrrell (whose name is misspelt or misprinted) is so far off the mark (page 158). Far from holding that revelation is 'nothing more than a consequence, in itself unimportant, of a naturally religious disposition', as Rahner asserts, Tyrrell would have been closer to Rahner's own view of 'the material contents of historical revelation as verbalized objectifications of *the* "revelation" which is already present in the gratuitous radicalizing of human transcendentality in God's self-communication'—except that Tyrrell could never have written such a phrase.

In the final section Rahner deals with Christological questions, once again defending the 'classical formulations', insisting that Christology should not be separated from soteriology as it was in pre-Vatican II textbooks, and recommending transcendental Christology and anonymous Christianity—after all, as he says (page 238), 'if I were not in reality already a crypto-Christian thanks to the grace of God I receive from the Spirit of Jesus, I could not make any sense of what is being said about this Jesus as the Christ'. Such splendidly simple encapsulations of his most characteristic theses enliven the otherwise rather familiar arguments.

FERGUS KERR OP

**RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY: SELECTED ASPECTS.** By Frederick C. Copleston. *Search Press/Notre Dame*. 1988.

We all owe an enormous debt to Copleston. Very few scholars could possibly rival the range of his erudition in the history of philosophy. Now, late in life, he caps it all with another major work on *Philosophy in Russia*, with this present, much shorter 'spin-off' concentrating on its religious aspects. In this case he does not seek to achieve anything very profound. There are only some brief critical comments, and virtually nothing by way of attempting to carry discussion further. But then that was not his aim, and so it would be churlish of a reviewer to complain of what was never part of his plan. For in fact the book succeeds admirably in its own terms, which is to introduce the main authors and leading ideas of modern Russian religious philosophy.

Here the dominating, almost inescapable influence is that of Vladimir Solovyev (1853—1900), and in particular his *Lectures on Godmanhood*,